DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 279 EC 202 478

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TITLE Child Watching: Determining the Quality of Handicapped Children's Social Interaction.
PUB DATE Nov 87
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Council for Exceptional Children's Topical Conference on the Future of Special Education (Orlando, FL, November 15-17, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adaptive Behavior (of Disabled); Affective Behavior; *Classroom Observation Techniques; *Disabilities; *Interpersonal Competence; *Mainstreaming; Peer Relationship; Preschool Education; Social Adjustment; *Social Development; *Student Behavior; Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

The paper presents an observational system for use in evaluating preschool handicapped children's social integration in mainstreamed classrooms. An adaptation of LeBlanc, Etzel, and Tyler's observational system, this model also employs White's system of evaluating affective tone. The method entails choosing a handicapped child in a classroom and a nonhandicapped child in the same class who is similar in age, sex, race, and ethnic background. Each of these children's social exchanges is then observed and recorded on a prescribed form. In recording, distinctions are drawn between initiations and responses and between verbal and nonverbal exchanges. The interactants (peer, teacher, subject) are identified for each exchange and the quality of the affect of the exchanges are recorded as positive, negative, or neutral. When recording is completed, the material is analyzed by tabulating the total scores of the initiations, responses, mode of communication (verbal or nonverbal), and affective tone of behavior for both the handicapped and nonhandicapped children. A ratio of the amount and quality of the interactions by both children is determined by dividing data for the handicapped subject's behavior by data for the nonhandicapped subject. (VW)

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Child Watching: Determining the Quality of Handicapped Children's Social Interaction

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ABSTRACT

Since one of the major goals of mainstreaming is improving social acceptance of handicapped children, a method of observation to determine the quality of these children's social interaction will be decribed. The ratio of handicapped children'a social exchanges in a classroom is compared to nonhandicapped chuldren's social exchanges in the same classroom. The method of recording verbal and nonverbal interactions will be explained. In addition, the affective quality of those interactions may be assessed, using the same instrument. Any school personnel will be able to use the method presented to determine the quality of mainstreamed children's social life in the classroom.

Introduction

One of the primary objectives of mainstreaming is the social interaction of the handicapped child into the microsociety of the regular classroom. This is presumed to be an early and critical step toward the implementation of the acceptance, to the greatest extent feasible, into the mainstream of American Society. Since the federal legislation (P.L.94-142) mandated that handicapped children be educated, a method of identifying patterns of this social interaction is needed, with nonhandicapped students to the maximum extent possible. Recent federal legislation, known as P.L.99-457, Education of Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986 will extend full rights and protection to handicapped children, ages three through five, by the school year 1990-91. This means services are mandated in all states for these children. The least restrictive environment is required in PL 94-142 - it is assumed that it is, also, required for the three to five year-old population.

But the critical question is does it work? In 1984 an analysis by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP) "found that little could be concluded about the efficacy of early intervention projects generally, due to frequency of serious methodological weaknesses" (Edmister & Ekstrand, 1987). Gresham (1982) stated that most research on mainstreaming in schools indicates little social interaction between handicapped and nonhandicapped students and little social acceptance of handicapped children. Most research, however, has been conducted in special preschools or "reversed mainstreamed" settings where there are more handicapped than nonhandicapped children in the observed classroom(s).

To date, there have been few systematic, naturalistic observations of actual social behavior in a sample of non-contrived, mainstreamed settings, despite the fact that such studies are generally recognized to have strong external validity (cf., Wynne, Ulfelder, and Dakof, 1975). Herink and Lee (1986) conducted a study describing some of the basic patterns of child-child and teacher-child interaction in a sample of mainstreamed Headstart classrooms. The following questions were addressed:

1.) What is the frequency of social interactions among retarded children, nonretarded children, and their teachers?

2.) What is the pattern of social initiatives and responses in mainstreamed classrooms?

3.) What is the affective quality of mainstreamed children's social interaction?

4.) To what extent does verbal exchange characterize social interactions of mainstreamed retarded preschoolers?

The method of observation used in that study will be explained, so that evaluation of handicapped children's social integration is possible. Not only must the integration occur, but it must be a positive experience which builds all children's ego and self-esteem.

Observational System

The observational instrument is an adaptation of LeBlanc, Etzel, and Tyler's (1974) observational system. In addition, White's (1977) system of evaluation of affective tone is used. In the Herink and Lee study this combined system was used, however, event sampling rather than time sampling was employed. This means that a specified number of social interactions

were observed for each subject, so there was an equal number of interactions per subject, but time sampling may be used instead:

The method is to choose a handicapped child in a classroom and a non handicapped child in the same class, who is similar in age, sex, race and ethic background. For example, a white, five-year-old nonhandicapped boy and a white, five-year-old handicapped boy would be the subjects. As unobtrusively as possible, observe and record, using the recording form in Appendix A, each of these children's social exchanges with other children. A "social exchange" (see Figure 1) is any verbal or nonverbal behavior directed by the subject (the child you are observing) toward any other child in the class or any behavior directed toward the subject. All behaviors are categorized as "initations" or "responses". An "initiation" is a behavior directed by one child toward another that gets a response from that child. The child who initiates is the one who begins the social exchange. A "response" is a behavior (verbal or nonverbal) that follows an initiation. Initiations are recorded in the upper left hand portion of every box in the top row of the recording form (Appendix A). The symbol S is used to indicate subject, P indicates a peer, and T indicates teacher. In the lower right hand corner, responses are recorded. Thus, every box must have an S and either a P or T. Furthermore, when the subject initiates to a peer, it is written as SP in the upper left hand corner of the box, if a peer responds, it is written as PS in the lower right hand box. Each exchange is recorded until there is: (1) a halt in the activity that lasts more than five seconds, (2) a change in the topic, (3) the subject leaves.

These social exchanges are called social interactions. If a new child arrives, that child becomes P_2 and so on for as many peer designations as are needed. When any of the situations mentioned above occurs that indicates the end of an interaction, a line is drawn after the box in which the last exchange was observed and recorded. This means the end of that social interaction.

Verbal exchanges are recorded in the top boxes which are designated by "V" in the left margin, and nonverbal in the bottom boxes which are designated by "N" in the left margin of the recording form (Appendix A). Verbal exchanges are any type of speech directed toward another person, such as, asking a question, commenting, or responding to a comment, etc. Nonverbal exchanges are any physical behaviors (movement toward, away from, or direct touch) directed toward another person, such as, handing or taking something to someone, holding someone's hand, hitting someone, gesturing someone to come or stay away, or caressing someone, etc.
Note: the contact must be purposeful, not accidental; the gesture must have public meaning; and minute gestures, such as, frowns, glares, or smiles are not recorded. Social interactions are one person's initiation followed by at least one response on the part of the other person.

For example, Tara, a nonhandicapped child, approaches Morgan, a handicapped child and says, "Hi, what's that"? This is recorded in the upper left hand box in the V row, because it is a verbal initiation.

It is recorded as PS because Morgan is the subject, at this time, and Tara is the peer. Morgan answers, "It's a truck", so a SP is placed in the right half of the same box. Then a teacher (all adults are designated as teachers) approaches and asks, "What are you doing"? This is recorded as TS in the right side of the next box. The subject responds "Nothing" so a ST goes in the right side of the next box. The subject then runs away, so a ST is placed in lower right side of the next box in the N row, because it is a nonverbal response. Then a line is drawn after that box because that social interaction has ended.

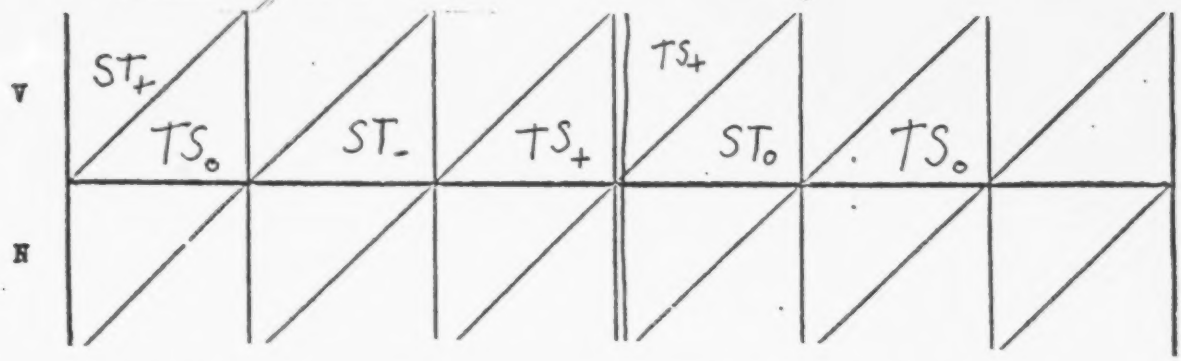
In addition to the verbal and nonverbal responses and initiations, the quality of the affect of the exchanges is recorded as positive, negative or neutral. A positive affective exchange is one that shows approval, acceptance, or affection, such as, a compliment, an expression of helpfulness, comforting, an invitation to join, or sympathizing, etc. The positive exchange is designated by a plus (+) symbol written next to the S, T, or P symbol in any of the boxes. A negative affective exchange is one that shows disapproval, rejection, or unhappiness, such as, insulting, crying, complaining, or taunting etc. This is designated by a (-) symbol. A "neutral affective exchange" is neither positive nor negative affective exchanges and is designated by a small (o) circle.

For example, the following <u>verbal</u> interaction would be recorded as:

Subject: Please come here. ST_+

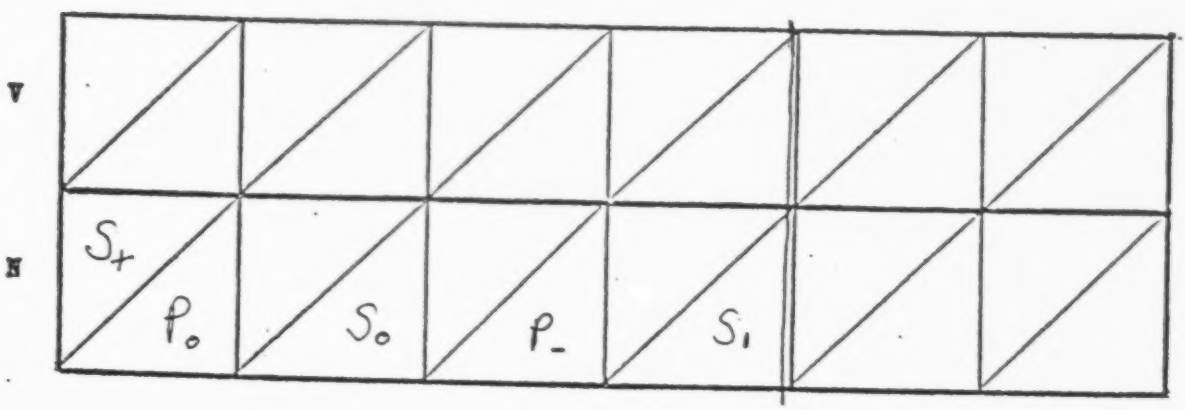
Teacher: What do you want? TS_0

Subject: I don't like him.	ST_-
Teacher: I like you.	TS_+
Teacher: That's a beautiful picture.	TS_+
Subject: It's red.	ST_0
Teacher: Put it in a box.	TS_0



The following nonverbal interaction would be recorded as:

Subject: (Walks over to table.)	S_+
Peer: (Pushes a car toward him.)	P_0
Subject: (Pushes it back)	S_0
Peer: (Turns her back to subject.)	P_-
Subject: (Throws car at peer.)	S_-



Two observers should simultaneously record the child's behavior until they reach 85% reliability, that is, agree 85% of a predetermined amount of time or events (social interactions) on the above defined behaviors. Thus, establishing inter-observer reliability. These persons should periodically check that their reliability continues throughout the observations.

Data Analysis

When the recording is completed, analysis of the material is done by tabulating the total scores of the (1) initiations, (2) responses, (3) mode of communication (verbal or nonverbal), (4) affective tone of behavior (positive, negative, or neutral). This data is tabulated for both the handicapped and nonhandicapped children.

The data are then calculated to determine the ratio of the amount and quality of the interactions by both groups of children by using the following formula for any of the behaviors observed:

$$\frac{\text{Handicapped subject's behavior}}{\text{Nonhandicapped subject's behavior}}$$

In addition, the researchers may analyze the data using any appropriate statistical tests to get further information about the observation.

Conclusion

Through the use of this system of observation, a teacher may determine the extent to which the mainstreamed children in a classroom are socially interacting. This will enable the teacher to appraise the quality of the mainstreamed child's social life. Hopefully, the researcher will report the findings, so a body of knowledge about mainstreaming which directly evaluates how effectively mainstreaming promotes social integration in the real world of classrooms will be developed.

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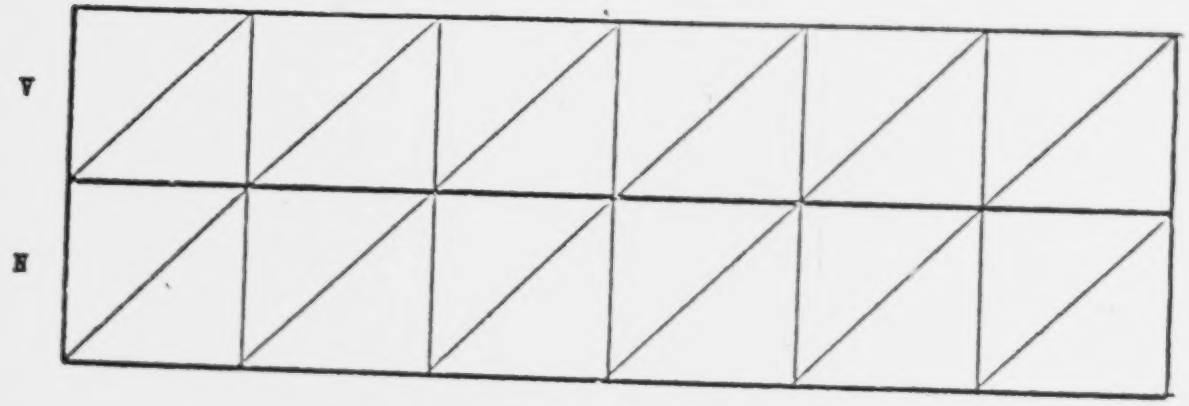
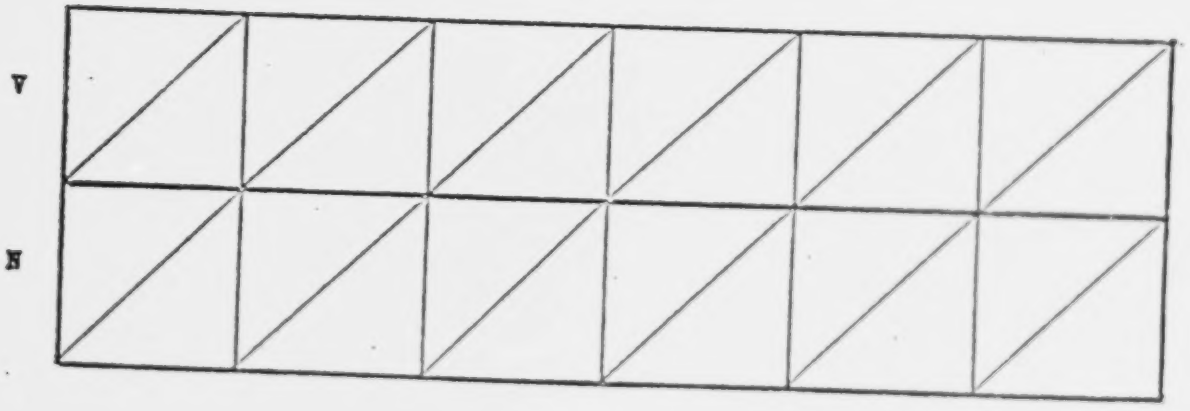
APPENDIX A

SAMPLE CODING SHEET

Subject _____ Age____ Sex____ School_____ Date ____





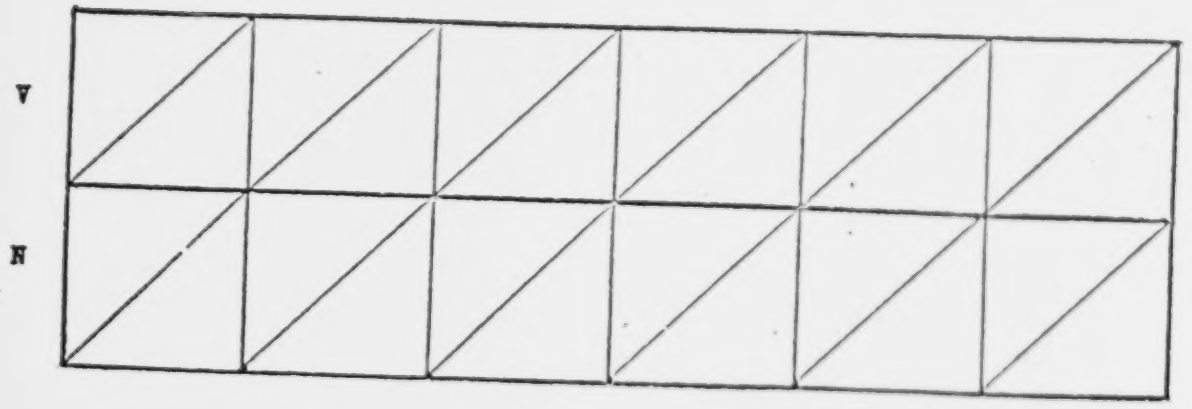


Figure 1 Observation Instrument

I. Categories of Social Behavior

1. Social exchange: The basic unit of observation in the present study, it refers to any verbal or nonverbal behavior directed by the subject toward another or by another toward the subject. These behaviors may be characterized as initiations or responses.
2. Initiation: refers to any social exchange directed by one person toward another which evokes a response from the other. The person who initiates is the one who begins a social interaction.
3. Response: refers to any social exchange directed by one person toward another in reaction to the others' social behavior. Responses follow either initiations or other responses. All exchanges which follow an initiation and are topically related to it are responses.
4. Social interaction: consists of one person's initiation followed by at least one response on the part of another person. One participant in a social interaction, either initiator or respondent, must be the subject. The end of a given social interaction is signalled by a halt in activity that lasts at least five seconds, a change in the topic of the interaction, a complete disengagement of the parties to the interaction, or the introduction of a new party to the interaction.

II. Characteristics of Social Behavior

1. Verbal Exchange: refers to any social exchange that involves speech directed at another person(s). The verbal data are simple counts of verbal exchanges, irrespective of their semantic quality.
2. Nonverbal Exchange: refers to any social exchange that does not involve speech. The minimum requirement for a nonverbal exchange is that it involve purposeful and publicly meaningful physical movement or contact directed toward another person(s).

3. Positive Affective Exchange: refers to any social exchange that shows manifest approval, acceptance, or affection. Examples: an expression of helpfulness, an invitation to join, offering to share, physical caressing, etc. For an exchange to be recorded as positive, it must include an obvious and unambiguous expression of positive affect. Subtle or muted expression of affect are not recorded.

4. Negative Affective Exchange: refers to any social exchange that shows manifest disapproval, rejection, or unhappiness. Examples: ridiculing, complaining, physical attacking, fleeing, etc. For an exchange to be recorded as negative, it must include an obvious and unambiguous expression of negative affect.

5. Neutral Affective Exchange: refers to any social exchange which is manifestly neither positive nor negative. Examples: asking for information, touching another, giving directions, answering a question, etc. Although these often include muted or subtle expressions of affect, they do not include obvious and manifest affective expression.